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Viewing cable 06PARIS5166, MICHEL ROCARD: DON'T RULE OUT A SURPRISE IN 2007

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06PARIS5166	2006-07-31 13:44	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Paris

Appears in these articles:

http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/documents-wikileaks/article/2011/02/09/wikileaks-les-visiteurs-de-l-ambassade_1477418_1446239.htm

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9945
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 005166

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/31/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: MICHEL ROCARD: DON'T RULE OUT A SURPRISE IN 2007
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

REF: 05 PARIS 7360

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Amb. Stapleton met with Michel Rocard on

July 19 (see reftel for report on previous meeting). Rocard, who supports Dominique Strauss-Kahn for the Socialist Party (PS) presidential nomination, appeared resigned to a Royal victory in the party primary. He regretted that neither she nor Nicolas Sarkozy, the current front-runners, have the requisite foreign policy experience for the job. Rocard also noted that although he believes the Fifth Republic has outlived its usefulness, no constitutional change is likely, given the array of problems facing France and the length of time it would take to debate and pass a new constitution. Finally, he voiced his well-known criticisms of his own PS, which still has not made the transition to a modern social-democratic party, missing yet another opportunity in June, when the party adopted its program. On Iraq, Rocard regretted errors by Chirac in handling the transatlantic relationship in the run-up to the war. Addressing the current situation, Rocard said the U.S. must not make an early exit from Iraq; a prolonged USG presence in Iraq will ultimately bring the U.S. and France together. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Michel Rocard, former prime minister under Mitterrand and current PS member of the European Parliament, offered views on the French political scene. Cautioning against too early a conclusion that either Segolene Royal or Nicolas Sarkozy will be elected president in 2007, Rocard cautioned that throughout the history of the Fifth Republic, candidates in the lead a year before the elections -- including Jacques Chaban-Delmas, Edouard Balladur, Raymond Barre, and himself -- have all failed to win the presidency. At the moment, "in the absence of other serious candidates, the least improbable scenario is a second-round contest between Royal and Sarkozy." However, he stressed, each election has produced a surprise, knocking out the front runner; it is the nature of a surprise that we don't know what that might be this time around.

¶3. (C) Rocard reprised his view that Sarkozy advocates "detestable" policies, particularly in the area of human rights, where he represents a "danger." Despite his continuing support for Dominique Strauss-Kahn for the PS presidential nomination, Rocard appeared resigned to a Royal victory within the party, referring to her as if she were already the nominee. Describing her as until now having lived a "peaceful little existence without conflict" as a deputy from Poitou-Charente, he implied that she would not be up to the rigors of a presidential campaign. He further worried about her lack of knowledge of foreign affairs -- he cited specifically the Middle East and "delicate" U.S.-French relations in this regard -- and economics. That said, he admitted that she is "not stupid" and has good advisors.

¶4. (C) Regarding the direction and reform of the PS, Rocard divulged that earlier that day, Royal had pulled him aside and told him she would like to see the PS head in a social democratic direction, along the lines of the socialist parties of Scandinavia. He conceded that she was saying what she knew he wanted to hear but surmised that she has some genuine interest in modernizing the party.

¶5. (C) Recalling the PS's November convention, Rocard noted that 57 percent of the party members voted to support a motion that would have effectively moved the PS toward the social democratic model. Rocard strongly regretted that the PS leadership preferred unanimity over change, ending up with a kitchen-sink approach to its program, and a squandered opportunity for a change of identity for the last socialist party in western Europe to embrace social democracy.

¶6. (C) Rocard also related his belief that the Fifth Republic has outlived its utility and that the constitution should be replaced with one that would diminish presidential power. He noted, however, that undertaking to revise the constitution would take two years, during which time nothing else would be accomplished in France. Political leaders would understandably consider the opportunity cost of such a project -- with an unknowable result -- too great. Furthermore, while constitutional reform may be of great interest to the political elite, it has little resonance with

public opinion.

17. (C) Rocard reiterated previously stated views that Chirac had grievously overplayed his hand in the lead-up to the 2003 intervention in Iraq and caused gratuitous harm to the Franco-American relationship. Rocard simultaneously criticized the USG for failing to appreciate French expertise on Arab cultures as well as France's own tragic experience in

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triggering and confronting insurgencies in the Maghreb and elsewhere. He concluded the meeting by remarking insistently that the USG must not leave Iraq. He added that the longer that the USG stayed in Iraq, the closer France and America would grow.

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